

THE
**Final
Straw**
A WEEKLY ANARCHIST SHOW

The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world.

You can send us letters at:
The Final Straw Radio
PO Box 6004
Asheville, NC 28816
USA

Email us at:
thefinalstrawradio@riseup.net
or **thefinalstrawradio@protonmail.com**

To hear our past shows for free, visit:
<https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org>

To support transcription and zine-making efforts which are funded by donations, visit:

<https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org/donate/>

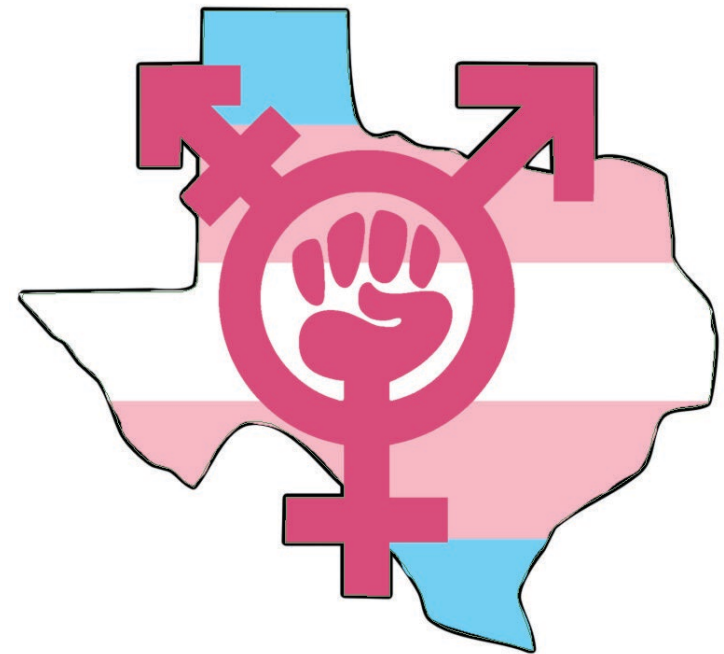
or via Patreon:

<https://www.patreon.com/tfsr>

or via LiberaPay, which does not take a cut of the payments:

<https://liberapay.com/The-Final-Straw-Radio/>

trans
resilience
in texas



THE FINAL STRAW RADIO
MAY 7TH, 2023

Our interview with journalist and community organizer, Kit O'Connell (of the Texas Observer), and anarchist and activist lorén (of QTPIE or Queer and Trans People Illuminate Everything). Both folks are trans folks in Austin, Texas, and we speak for the hour about the increasing legal and social oppression of trans and gender non-conforming folks in that state as well as across the so-called USA, some of its impacts on trans children and children of trans parents, organizing, allyship and community defense.

Instagram: [@qtpiepicnic](https://www.instagram.com/qtpiepicnic)

Search for this interview title at <https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org/> to find links to further resources on this topic, featured music, the audio version, and files for printing copies of this episode.

as a friend, should they just make friends and then ask around? Or is there a way to interface with you all?

I: Yeah, so the Instagram account for the picnic is just [@QTPIEPicnic](https://www.instagram.com/qtpiepicnic). So QTPIE Picnic, it sort of puts together the next flyer and some information about where to go to the barbecue and how to bring picnic supplies if you want to do that. I don't know if this made it out of Texas, per se, but at the action at the Capitol on Tuesday there were a couple of protesters who were caught up by DPS [Department of Public Safety]. They've been released, they put out on PR [personal recognizance] bonds, which is wonderful. But we quickly realized that we didn't have a trans legal fund put together yet, so the QT Pies have put together one that is sort of operating now that can also be found on the Instagram.

KO: And then you can find me as Kit O'Connell on just about every big social network. I'm no longer active on Twitter, though, you'd need to find me on Mastodon as Kit O'Connell, I'm on a couple places there. And I work for a 16 year old publication called The Texas Observer which covers kind of a pretty wide umbrella of the left, so that includes the liberal left, as well as the radicals up to the further left, like us. And I'll just say one of the ways to act in this world that is helpful is to support journalists who you appreciate, whether that's podcasters or independent media groups like Unicorn Riot or whatever, they do some amazing work. Or it's left leaning publications like The Texas Observer, or reaching out directly to reporters that have Patreon that you like their work. The old model of journalism is dying, for good and for ill, but the way to see that there's more than just the right wing platforms left when this all shakes out is we need people to throw their capitalist resources our way.

TFSR: And your publication just recently pulled together and saved itself through a crowdfunding, right?

KO: Yeah, that's correct. Yeah, we almost had our doors shut. We have a brand new board of directors, it's much more supportive of what we're doing. If you want to help keep us alive the best way right now is just to become a member of texasobserver.org/join. There's a 99 cent a month option that you can get on and even that helps because it does kind of help boost our numbers when we go to the rich people that sometimes throw big checks our way. Every bit actually really does help. I appreciate everybody that goes to support The Texas Observer and any local media that matters to you.

so-called USA, who view what we're seeing now with the legalized attacks on health care access, and against queer folks, as the death throes of an ideology whose time has come to pass, as many younger folks, measurably, have expressed feeling in studies.

My personal feeling is that that's optimism speaking, and that this is part of a long term and well planned out strategy to further disenfranchise the majority of the population ala the origins of the fascist settler state. I wonder if you all have an assessment of this sort of back and forth, these two different ideas, and what's coming next and how we should prepare for that part of the fight for liberation.

I: Fascism doesn't go out with a whimper. Fascism is not something that simply dies. The person, what's his name, Knowles, Michael Knowles, who calls for the "eradication of transgenderism in public life", quote, unquote, is my age. And sure, I might be, I guess, a little bit older, and it's kind of harder to accept sometimes. But just because it's a legislature full of old white men, doesn't mean that there's not a cadre of young white men ready to take up arms and follow in their position. So, I don't think it's optimism, necessarily, to say that this is a dying ideology. I think it's naive to say that. This is not something that you can let die. This is something that you must force to die. Because that is the only way that fascism has ever died.

KO: Yeah, I mean the founder of Patriot Front was under 21 when he started that organization. I think that's another example. At every antifascist protest I've been out where we've confronted fascists, there's always been some young people that were brought along by their parents at that event.

I remember, this was 2012 so I mean, pre-Trump when all this seems kind of far off, this moment. I attended with some comrades, we were like the three people counter protesting at the massive, massive Rally for Life that they hold every year here in Texas. Dan Patrick, now the Lieutenant Governor, got up and spoke at that and said "in our lifetime, we're going to eradicate abortion, and gay marriage". And people cheered. Tens of thousands of people cheered. And there were whole Boy Scout troops at that.

It's something we have to fight, we have to out organize, and we have to outfight them. This is a moment when people are going to be asked to make hard decisions to protect their communities, and I hope that they are willing to choose the right side, the side of humanity in these coming moments when they're asked to make tough choices about following orders.

TFSR: lorén, and Kit thank you both for having this conversation with me. I really appreciate you taking the time and talking about some really depressive, but ever-looming, issues. Are there, if you wouldn't mind, reiterating ways that people can, if you have work online, find your work? Or if someone's in the Austin area and they want to show up at one of those barbecues

TFSR: So I wonder if you two would introduce yourselves for the audience with whatever names organizational or political affiliations you want to give, preferred gender pronouns, that sort of information.

KO: Sure. My name is Kit O'Connell. I'm a community organizer and journalist from Austin, Texas. I use they/them pronouns, I'm gender queer. I am digital editor with the Texas Observer and I've been an organizer with various leftist and antifascist community groups for years and years now.

I: Hi, my name is lorén. I use they/she pronouns, I identify as a gender queer, trans-feminine person. I am sort of a member of this group called QTPIE. We do some fun things. And then, yeah, I guess I've been organizing since the Iraq war. That was sort of my first foray into it. And I'm here in Central Texas continuing that work.

TFSR: Would you mind saying a few things about QTPIE and what y'all do, or do you want to keep it kind of vague? That's okay.

I: Yeah, no, I'm happy to talk about QTPIE. I think it's a really...I hesitate to call it an "organization" cause it honestly operates more as a group chat than anything else, but there is a shared identity within that chat. It started off with me, and then a friend of mine, Max, we were painting some signs for a rally and it kind of grew and evolved from that. We started getting together more, we started to commune more. And then I think people started to notice, and we got more and more people involved in the chat. Now I very much view it as something not quite, I think, to the organizational structure of the MACC [Metropolitan Anarchist Coordinating Council] up in New York, but it's a similar concept. It's really just a bunch of people that do their own things kind of come together and talk about the things that they're doing and then sort of break off into their own little chats and working groups to go from there.

KO: We should say too, since this is audio medium, right? It's "q" "t", letter "q" letter "t", it's a pun too.

I: It's an acronym, and a pun, and it stands for "queer and trans people illuminate everything".

TFSR: Okay. Oh, that's awesome.

I: Yeah, the idea behind it is definitely centering queer joy. And sort of the main thing that we put together is a monthly picnic. It doesn't have an official name, which I also, it changes names every month. I think I was calling it "The Jones Gay Ass Barbecue and Foot Massage", "The Queer and Trans Picnic Potluck Extrav-

agayza”, “The Gay Ass Picnic”. Just all sorts of goofy things to remind ourselves that while a lot of things that are happening politically, right now are very serious, there’s no reason that we have to be serious all the time. Especially when we’re surrounded by others who see us for who we truly are, and accept us.

TFSR: Yeah, that’s really awesome. Thank you for eliminating that and Kit thanks for asking for the details on that. Well, I think a lot of this conversation is going to be covering some of the more serious depressing stuff. But yeah, thank you both for being here. And Kit thank you so much for your journalism.

So here’s my long winded introduction: the war of cis hetero patriarchy, its focussed on the story of an endangered and weak subject, whether that be imagery of the femme or the child at the hands of what they consider to be the enemy. The gender fascist create a myth of “the groomer”, in the last two years, it’s transferred from immigrants, and particularly Muslims to now non-cis people in the UK. In Russia now the model is currently moved to homosexuals. In this kind of creeping that you see in these countries, it’s almost the same playbook is being enacted in many countries. Maybe that is arguably what’s happening.

I wonder if y’all could talk a bit about this imagery and the real life impacts of these words and actions on youth and other marginalized people in Texas where you’re experiencing it. Or if I got something wrong with the question please correct me.

I: No, I think it’s interesting that you link what’s happening here to what’s happening internationally because we do see it. Especially, the first place that comes to my mind is Uganda as well, where LGBTQ folks are literally illegal. We’ve seen that there is a concentrated effort by a core group of people through leaked documents here in the so-called “United States” as well. So it’s doesn’t take that big of a stretch of imagination to say that these people are trying to do the same thing.

But globally- a lot of times we talk about these conspiracies, these larger things that are happening as if there’s a core group of seven people in a room tapping their fingers together maniacally and coming up with these plans. But it doesn’t take that for it to happen, for other people with similar interests, to sort of look at what’s happening, and then follow the same model. Just , the same is true with the 1%: they’re not all getting together in a boardroom and doing these things. They’re just each individually taking action that protects themselves, which in essence, protects their group, their 1% group. And I think that’s probably more than likely what’s happening here as well. It’d be great if it was a singular cadre, because then those people [laughs] could be dealt with. But it’s more insidious than that. I don’t know Kit, what do you have to say?

KO: I mean, that’s the essential appeal of the superhero comic, right? It’s that we

what that’s going to mean, because it’s just such a background part of their life.

This is essentially about public participation. This is about making it as impossible as they can to exist as an LGBTQIA+ person in so-called Texas. That is genocide as surely as if they were collecting us into the camps already. They want to, again, they want to eradicate transgender people. And it’s as simple as that, and I don’t even know, [laughs] I’m at a loss for words.

I: Yeah, no, I mean, that’s what it is. And I think, much in the same way that people get mocked for calling people Nazis or fascist, because it seems to be one of those words that’s “overused”, like “Oh, you just have somebody that you disagree with, you can end the argument by calling them a fascist”. But I think the reality of that word is, it’s because there are a lot of fascists out there. That’s why you’re hearing this word a lot. And the same is true for genocide, genocidal rhetoric and genocide laws. This is not hyperbole, this is not an attempt to win an easy internet argument. This is because this is exactly what you’re seeing. And for some people, it’s going to take a lot more for them to internalize and understand that that is exactly what’s happening here.

Florida wants to take away children who are being affirmed by their parents. They also want to take away children from transgender parents. They’re trying to do that in Texas as well, through the Department of Family and Protective Services. I have a folder that’s full of information from doctors and therapists, and friends and teachers that outlines how much I love my child, so that if that Family Protective Services does come after us, I have supporting documents in the moment where I can say, “No, this is not child abuse. No, I love my child. Yes, I know what I’m doing and this is the best thing that I can do for them”. I’m on a list here already. The Attorney General asked the Texas DPS, the Department of Public Safety, for a list of individuals who have submitted for a gender marker change in their documents. That’s a list of trans people that Ken Paxton — who’s been indicted for three felonies by the way — that’s a list that Ken Paxton has of trans-identified people in this state.

How does this not begin to look genocide? You’re breaking apart families, you’re making lists, you’re trying to remove the opportunity for insurance and health care that is life affirming health care? How long is it before I can be fired for being trans? How long is it before I can be kicked out of my house, or my apartment for being trans? These are very real things. And look, I’m not drawing a correlation to the Weimar Republic because the historical circumstances are very different. But whenever you say genocide, or whenever you say, Holocaust, that’s what people go to. And like Kit said, that’s not the only thing that genocide can look like. It can look like exactly what’s happening right now.

I’m so fucking tired...

TFSR: Yeah. Thank you. Thank you for sharing that. So I’ve spoken with some comrades who grew up in reactionary Christian communities in the

TFSR: It's only dirty if you want it to be.

I: And I do.

TFSR: For me, it's beautiful and amazing. And obviously a self sustaining life force thing that people continue to have public events, and that people continue to have, whether it be drag events in bars that are directed towards adults that are more burlesque-y, or reading events meant for kids. When I think of hard places in the country to be out and trans I think of Texas, and I think of Florida above all. But as has been said, it's everywhere. Have you seen a lot of opposition, violent reactionary opposition and threats to shut down spaces and to shut down events? Has that continued? Has that built? Has that stayed as steady? Like is it the same assholes doing it?

I: Yeah, no, there was, I think last month, there was a drag show that was protested by armed protesters in San Antonio, but met with counter protesters. There's another one that's happening here in Austin on Saturday, I believe there are people intending to protest and so there are people signing up to be counter protesters as well. And so, ya know, people are definitely taking that cowboy action of being their own law enforcement or moral enforcement or whatever twisted ideas they have in their mind about what they are and what's happening. It is absolutely the case, but it is being met by our community with as much force as we can muster.

My only fear is that it's going to end in violence. It's going to end in violence. I mean, hell, the Garrett Foster trial just ended and this was an event that happened three years ago. It took that long for that man to be put to justice. I would hate for us to see something like that happen, to galvanize people into action. Or to call more attention to the nature of the imminent threat that this is to us, the existential crisis that we're that we're falling into. Honestly, a part of me is really worried that that's what is gonna have to happen for some people to wake up and see that when we use the word "genocide", we're not using it lightly. We're not using it for shock value. We're using it because this is the actual and full intent of this rhetoric and of these laws.

KO: They straight up said out loud now that they want to eradicate transgender people, they said that at CPAC and they can try to weasel out of it. But we all heard what they said. I mean, I wish more people heard it. Something that I always try to emphasize, I'm not the only person to say this, but genocides are not just putting people into camps. It's just the whole process, and it is also making it impossible for our community to live. It's not just putting the bullets to their head, it's making it so they can't access health care, so that they can't access education freely, so that they can't go out in a public place, and pee if they need to pee. That doesn't feel so significant until you think about what it would mean to not be able to go anywhere and pee when you go out in public. And I think cis people don't really think about

could find the people responsible for, say, climate change and punch them in the nose. But it's never that simple. We do know there is some international coordination, and I think, lorén put it very accurately that some of it is following the playbook, seeing what works in one place and repeating that in another. But we do also see coordination across countries. We know that in Uganda, for example, that American conservatives consulted with some of those officials.

There was a recent leak, Wired magazine broke a story just the other day about a leak from the American College of Pediatricians, which is an anti-trans, anti-abortion, anti-premarital sex, super conservative organization, supposed to be doctors that's meant to sound like the American Academy of Pediatrics, which is what everyone's heard of. But the American College of Pediatricians sponsors a lot of, or is involved in, a lot of the anti-trans, anti-abortion legislation. We can see them coordinating with other groups. Even in these leaked files, we can see them consulting, I think it's with some officials in Bulgaria, I want to say. So we do know that there is some international coordination to achieve these overall aims of restricting bodily autonomy, whether that's reproductive freedoms, or LGBTQIA+ freedoms. It's very intersectional from their side as well as from ours.

I: I was gonna say, just very interesting. For eight years it seemed the rhetoric was at least dying down on a national stage. They struck down the law in Texas that made sodomy illegal, gay marriage became a thing, finally. And then there was a big turn that was. Nine years ago? I don't think people's ideas changed, I think that they were given permission to more freely speak what they had already been thinking. In terms of real world repercussions, the increased harassment on the street, the increase in policing and "othering" of people in everyday life has been a very real effect post-2016.

People talk about all the time when I tell them that I live in this little blue dot and a sea of red, they're like, "Oh, well at least that's nice". But I think we all know that liberal democracies paved the way for fascism. And still, as I walk around the streets, I'm harassed on a daily basis. Not just looks but people verbally accosting me. I can't sit down at a shared table and not have a family that has a small child pick that child up and move to another table because of that groomer rhetoric that's been passed around with me. It's made it much more difficult for visible trans people to make it through. Whereas people in 2013 may have been like "Oh RuPaul!". Now it's I'm a man and a dress and I'm a groomer.

That takes a psychological toll. Even if it doesn't put me in necessarily physical harm's way every time. It doesn't put me in jail when people say and do these things, but moving through this world as somebody with tits and a beard, it's a challenge. And I think that's true no matter where you are at this point, even though people want to focus on the 26 states that are enacting anti-LGBTQ policies. It's very similar, I think, in fact, how people talk about racism. They're like "Well, it's really bad in the south. But here, we're not racist". And I'm like, "No, New York, you still are. Like very clearly and you have things to work through".

I think transphobia is very much in the same way where it's not the South per se, but it's "the red states [Republican Party controlled] and the blue states [Democratic Party controlled]" dialog. And people don't understand that it can be just as dangerous in California, as it is in Texas. The only distinction is that the transphobia may take a slightly different form, but it's still there. It's still insidious.

KO: I guess, also, I want to add to this in terms of consequences. I'm glad you brought that up again, because that's important. We already have, I'm gonna use a term that journalists use mostly about other countries, we have "Internally Displaced People" in the United States, who are essentially internal refugees from the states that they were born or raised in.

I know people, one that I can talk about, because she's been in the news publicly, is a young woman named Kai Shappley. And Kai Shappley was raised in a conservative family, came out — at a lot of personal consequence — as trans. Ended up testifying at, I believe seven years old, against the first wave of bathroom bills that we saw. Some of those were beaten back. She ended up having to move from her small town in Texas to Austin. Because again, it's that blue dot, and she knew she could go to school here, and have at least sort of a surface level of respect of her pronouns and her family's choices.

But then just over the last year, as the state has opened child abuse investigations against parents of trans kids, simply because they have trans kids and are accepting of their identities, she's had to leave the state.

I did a photo essay collaboration with this artist Jesse Freidin in our magazine, which is this beautiful photo essay of trans and non gender nonconforming young people just really expressing themselves. And the photographer had planned to photograph Kai Shappley and had made plans with her. But the time he got to Texas to do the photography, she'd already had to pull up stakes and flee the state.

I: Yeah, personally I know six families that have transgender children that have already left this state for safer states. And we do see that happening a lot. People ask me when am I moving? I also have a 14 year old who is also trans. The reality is, one, I can't afford it. Moving across the country is a huge expense. And then, two, why should I have to move? You're the one that sucks, you move. This is my home and I have every right to be here.

Lastly, there are going to be trans kids born here tomorrow. I'm staying for those first two reasons, but I'm also staying because somebody needs to be here to fight for that, because they will be here. And if all of the trans people leave the red states and go to a quote unquote "blue state" that doesn't mean that there won't be any trans people in that state anymore, because there will be. And now it'll be even more dangerous because there have been no systems and no communities that have a place for them when they figure out who they are.

I think that's probably one of the most dangerous things about this internal displacement that I don't see people talking about. I understand why people

for us is: why those people who are being directly affected by it, choose to not take action. Because I can sit here and I can complain about our cis-het allies all day long, and I will, because you need to be in the streets with us. But I'm also looking at the rest of our community and saying, "Where are you? Where is this outrage that I know that you have, I know that you're capable of. I saw you in the streets three years ago. And now it's on us. And you're not here?" That doesn't make any sense to me. It doesn't make any sense to me, and I'm tired of trying to make it make sense.

KO: I completely agree with everything you just said, lorén, you're a really wise person and I appreciate being on this with you. One thing I've been attending a couple of events recently, and maybe writing about for the magazine, is local drag troupe called Vanguard, which is a Black lead drag troupe here in town, and the leader of it, Hermajestie The Hung, is very deliberate about invoking this political moment at every event. It's not just a drag show, but Hermajestie starts it by talking about the importance of trans rights, queer rights, bodily autonomy, all bodies are beautiful. There's this litany every time about almost creating a political space out of the drag show.

I think, to me, one thing is, let's keep having the celebrations. Let's keep having the drag shows, let's keep building joyful queer culture. But let's also not be afraid to bring politics into those spaces and speak up because those spaces reach both the cis allies that might act and our own community that is still, unfortunately, apathetic about how bad things are getting or about to get. I want to give respect to Hermajestie in the Vanguard troupe because I think that's a great example of turning these events into something more powerful. And of course it's the Black community leading it here, where they've been under pressure the longest.

I: Yeah. To that same point, I really appreciate you mentioning Vanguard, because you're right, Hermajestie is doing , not only phenomenal political activist work, but her drag performances as well are so politically charged and esoteric and pushing the boundaries. They're really, really spectacular. We've also got Brigitte Bandit, who is being an incredibly vocal ally, who's another drag performer here in Austin. That not only shows up at the State House, but also shows up and is political in her drag shows, as well.

And then the folks, you know, the ballroom community, I'm thinking specifically House of Lepore very much kind of doing the same thing. And I think that's the point that makes me even more frustrated, because it's not just you making noise. It's not just me making noise. It's not just Equality Texas, and the Texas Freedom Network making noise. It's already out there in the community, our entertainers and our activists are making that noise, and people [sighs] aren't coming. They should be coming. I didn't mean that to sound as dirty as it was, but you're welcome.

it something to watch out for? And how do you think that the wider the queer community is doing?

I: Well, I think we definitely see, on a national stage, gay people who sort of fit this description of “LGB drop the T” movements. I don’t think that it is in any way, shape, or form a wave that’s moving through the community. I do believe these to be relatively isolated based on my experience. I’m being asked to speak at the Dyke March for pride next month, as a trans person unintentionally being centered and put in front of this. There are groups out there that see what’s happening and remain sympathetic because they understand that.

I did some quick math and Austin has the third largest amount of LGBTQ people per capita of any city in the United States. There’s over 135,000 and LGBTQ+ people in Austin, period, which is a lot. Well in the Austin Metro area, I guess I should say. And then there’s a 2022 census study that said that in Texas 0.52% of Texans identify as transgender, which, if I had to extrapolate the number in Austin, considering that they tend to be a little bit denser in urban than rural areas, anywhere between 10 to 20,000 transgender identifying people in just the city limits. Probably closer, or up to, 30,000 if we’re looking at the Austin Metro area.

The really frustrating thing about that, for me is [that] I know that these people aren’t LGB people, because I do see that being a very small percentage, but I haven’t seen 135,000 people at the state capitol. I haven’t seen 20,000 people inside the rotunda. I haven’t seen 15,000 people try to pack in the house gallery and make noise. I guess maybe we’re just not at that point yet, but that’s why I think what we see happening right now is so important, that we are creating these doors and these focal points.

Because if it’s not now, it’s going to be in 2024 — if Republicans take national elections — and then if it’s not in 2024, it’s going to be in 2025 what happens at our state house again. That’s 135,000 people who are about to have nothing to lose. I’m just wondering, I don’t know, if they don’t accept it yet, if they don’t understand where the risk is at. If they haven’t lost it so they’re not willing to do something that could risk losing it.

I just, I just don’t, I don’t know where everybody is. I look at what was happening in 2020, where we had the cops killed a man, and they had been killing them, and everybody stood up and said, “Enough is enough”. And we had riots, demonstrations and defunding of police all over the country. And that’s not happening here, even though it is happening all over the country. The response in my limited understanding, of my limited worldview from this one little place that I have out of my apartment, I’m looking at this going “Where is it? Where’s the outrage? Where are the people who care about this?”

I know even if... We never saw 20,000 people in the street around the state capitol when we were doing the George Floyd rebellion. If we can get all 20,000 of those people here right now, I mean, what can be possible? I think the question

leave for their safety. I understand why people leave for their children. We all have an acceptable level of risk that we’re willing to accept. We all have our baseline quality of life that we’re willing to accept. And once you fall below that threshold...I’m not trying to dog on anybody that is leaving or has left or is thinking about it. That’s your choice and you do what you need to take care of you. But at the same time, we do need people to stay here and fight. Because the kids are going to be here tomorrow.

TFSR: So it makes a lot of sense, what you’re saying definitely makes a lot of sense to me. That folk staying behind, that not just emptying the apparent landscape of trans folks creates, in a lot of ways, a less supportive and more dangerous situation for the folks that are to come. Or the folks that are going to need to transition in various ways to make themselves more public and therefore, maybe more of a target. A friend of mine Margaret Killjoy-

I: Oh!

KO: Love her work. They’re so cool, they’re so cool.

TFSR: She had put out a very public call on a couple of social media saying that folks need to start speaking out and acting up in support of their trans family and comrades and community. I wonder if you have any examples that you can think of cis comrades stepping up and speaking out, and not just speaking out but also acting in solidarity with what the trans communities are going through. Or ways that you think that people should challenge themselves to step into that role and be more active?

I: Yeah, that’s really funny. I have three cis friends, literally everybody else is trans and nonbinary. Which, the T4T [Trans For Trans] lifestyle is a very common thing. Of course you want to be surrounded by people who understand you in a way that a lot of other people can’t, so there’s an attraction to being sort of in that space. But all three people that I am friends with who are cisgender, are wildly active. And I think that’s the only reason that we are friends is because I do see them doing things. And I know that they are backing up their feelings with actions.

One friend is very good at putting his body in the way to protect trans people from harm. And I’ve seen him do so on multiple occasions, helping trans people stay safe by making himself not safe. I think that’s definitely an extreme example, but one that I think a lot of cis people could learn from, is that you have the opportunity to use your cis privilege when being confronted with threats from either from the state or from non-state actors. And you can use that privilege to protect people, because you are less likely to come to harm than they will.

I’ve got another friend, her name is Lauren, which is really fun. We hang out all the time, she spells it a little differently. People always pronounce her name

“lorén”, and pronounce my name Lauren, it’s flip flopped. But she’s got a mouth and she uses that now. She’s a storyteller, she hops on stages, she does open mic nights and that kind of thing. And so she’s very comfortable speaking to crowds. The thing that I see her doing very often is using that voice of hers in places that are both on and off the stage to correct people when they misgender, to call people out when they say transphobic things. I mean, she does that in my presence and I know that she does that outside of my presence as well.

And then my third friend is not loud, and is not big. But he has found his way to utilize his cisgender privilege by consistently showing up to everything. Every event, every rally, every March, standing there in solidarity with us. I think those are three wonderful examples of things that cis people can do that you should.

KO: Those are great examples. I think there’s almost infinite ways to do something. At this point I’m happy just to see people doing something. We can argue about utility and what’s the best tactic and stuff, but I just want people to get off their butts. Because too many of them are just sitting down and watching. And it feels like even some of the people that were engaged kind of in the last wave of legislation that stayed silent during this wave of it, and I don’t fully understand why that is. Speaking out is valuable. You can do online research and help figure out who’s responsible for things, help identify people that are harming trans and queer people. You know, the kind of online antifascist research.

I am fortunate enough to work with a number of cisgender allies that have been extremely helpful in helping our communities be safer. Sometimes it has been physically putting themselves in between the potential harm and the person who would be vulnerable to it. And sometimes it’s virtually doing so as well, that can be really valuable. People dog on online activism — and there’s valid criticisms of that — but it’s also, it is a place we all live our lives these days. And so there are a lot of ways for people to plug in: doing online research, making phone calls when it’s necessary.

We recently had a transphobic organization holding a conference in town, and we were able to successfully get three different venues to kick them out. They ended up essentially having to retreat to sort of right wing think tank offices to hold their events. While it didn’t shut them down, it very clearly illustrated the connections that they have and we certainly made their lives a little more miserable. That was done by phone calls. And that’s not enough, it’s not going to save trans kids that need access to health care tomorrow after it’s been made illegal. But it’s a step and it just makes everything function a little less smoother for the people that want to run us over. And I think that that just every little act of throwing yourselves in the way of that genocidal machinery, I have to hope it’s going to add up,

I: I think that’s a really wonderful point where literally everything and anything that you can do adds to it. And I think beyond just simply adding to the fact that it’s accomplishing a task. Kicking the TERF’s out of a venue, or standing up to

people more of a platform or not? I mean, honestly it’s, at this point, a mainstream Texas GOP position, too, right? I mean we can talk about the funders, but those funders are also just essentially the funders of the Republican Party.

I: It’s literally on their platform.

KO: Yeah, they tweet about it. One of my articles recently was about the Texas Department of Agriculture, their workers now have to follow a transphobic dress code. The dress code says they have to follow, quote, unquote, “their biological gender”, which is not a thing, gender isn’t biological, but that’s what it says. And the Agricultural Commissioners elected position here, he’s just tweeting, I guess he doesn’t have anything to do with agriculture, actually, because he spends his day lately tweeting about how much he hates trans people and how dangerous we are. That’s the Agriculture Commissioner. To me that kind of drives home just how mainstream, like- that’s someone who I’m sure was our enemy 10 years ago, in all kinds of ways. But for them to be so openly, just like, “Yep, I hate trans people. This is my mainstream position that will win the votes”. I think it speaks to where things have gotten with that.

We do see a lot of the regulars of white supremacy here. Of course Patriot Front essentially, is based out of Texas is one example. But to me, it’s really the most dangerous, the lobbyists and the Republicans that are essentially trying to take power. Not to absolve the Democrats of responsibilities, but if the Republicans are so actively planning for a genocide in this moment, we can call out the funders, we can call out the people investing in these things, and I think that is valuable. But I think, to me, right now, it’s just most important to say it’s system wide at this point, and they want to take what’s happening in these red states and make it nationwide and they’re very close to doing that. It is happening everywhere at this point in one form or another.

TFSR: lorén had mentioned the gathering of wider LGBTQI community coming out in support for community defense to events like this. Recognizing a commonality of this encroachment, this targeting of one specific, more systematically marginalized part of this wider community, and it’s going to continue peeling back the layers of onion, and getting further and further in. When they come for trans youth, they’re going to come for trans adults. When they come for those communities, they’re going to be coming for gay lesbian folks, non-binary folks. It’s just going to continue because that is the drive that a lot of the Christian fundamentalists are coming from anyway.

I have heard over the last few years of some success in some places of TERFs, for instance, recruiting gay and lesbian, or being gay and lesbian organizers and dropping the “T” off of LGBTQ. Have you seen that sort of thing happening? Is that a thing? Am I just blowing it out of proportion because there’s just a couple of wing nuts in the world that are loud? Or is

I think there is that tendency on the left, for understandable reasons, because of infiltration and attacks and all the things we deal with, to just build our own walls around our communities and not let others in. But the reality is that there are ways to organize, by building affinity groups of people you trust, you can then use those affinity groups as a launching place to work with larger groups of people that are somewhat less vetted, that are more open to other people. That allows for a lot of stuff that doesn't require a top grade security culture, like a banner drop. Yeah, you want to be careful to protect that. But you don't need like 256 bit PGP encryption and a Tor browser to do that. Right? You can invite your neighbor to come to a banner drop, if you think they're sympathetic. That is something that I think you can do, and should do.

I: Yeah. I mean, I think that was also a really powerful moment that we saw in the statehouse. I know there's been some banner drops that happened around the city this legislative session, but to see not one but two separate banner jobs happen in the State Capitol on Tuesday was amazing. There was a huge banner dropped in the rotunda, and then there were two more banners that were dropped inside the house gallery itself, before it was cleared by the Speaker. And I do think that those are really powerful moments.

I view a lot of people that come from those other liberal organizations, and who are rallied by them as ripe for radicalization. I'm often fond of saying that people are radicalized two ways: they're either radicalized by theory — they read Foucault, and they're like “Oh, yeah, this makes a lot of sense” — or they're radicalized by experience. And I think the people that we're seeing at the Capitol right now are people who are being radicalized by their lived experience. It is almost exclusively trans and queer people, and occasionally a smattering of lesbian and gay allies. There's almost no cis-het people there. It's astounding, how little action the larger cis hetero population has taken at the state Capitol with anything having to do with these anti LGBTQ policies. And I think that's actually pushing the queer and trans folks a little bit farther and a little bit more radical, because they're realizing that we don't really have allies outside of our community.

TFSR: Kit had mentioned one of the groups that had been chased out of a few venues trying to have their public event. I wonder if you all have a roster of any organizations that you can name that are behind some of this legislation that's harming so many people in the state of Texas, that you'd want to name for people to keep on their radars.

KO: I mean, I mentioned the American College of Pediatricians earlier, just because there has been this big leak of documents from them. I'm hoping there's gonna be some more stories out of that. The Wired article was pretty surface, but that's understandable. I've got a hard drive with 40 gigs or so files on it, [laughs] so it's a lot to sort through. It's a tough question, because it's like, do we want to give those

counter protesters of a drag show, those moments are also really significant and solidifying the trust and sense of community that people have with each other as they're sort of moving through this. I'm seeing a lot of new people discover and a lot of new activists, trans and otherwise, come into this with really wide eyes and a lot of energy. And it's been nice to see how things like that have sort of solidified the relationship that people have to each other, in the hopes of creating something bigger, in the hopes of making us safer in the future.

TFSR: I think all of those examples are really inspirational. So, lorén, for instance, you've talked about the real life impacts of just regularized transphobia on the street, and you're getting harassed. I would imagine that your kid has also gotten a lot of shit at school at various points.

I: I've had three separate meetings with the vice principal and the principal about targeted bullying at school. My kid gets called a “tranny” and a “fag” by other students. And this is not surprising considering the area that the school is in, it's definitely a redder part of the region. But yeah, it's awful.

TFSR: And I think that our strength as communities is by forming communities. By forming affinity, by seeing the humanity in each other and being willing to do community defense around that, and all the different ways that you've described — whether it be phone numbers, or showing up in person or putting your body on the line. Another part of this, and a reinforcing part of what I would say is an increasing wave of the social acceptability of transphobia and generalized gender fascism that's going on, is also underpinned by or supported by legislation and court decisions by these institutional organizations.

Some of those are backed by private foundations or church groups or whatever, but these bigger examples of things that are outside of the realm necessarily of the community organizing level. Like, I'm an anarchist myself, I have difficulty engaging with these bigger organizations and feeling good about the way that I'm putting energy in calling representatives or engaging with electoral politics, but I understand that that's also one of the big levers that is creating bans on bathrooms. Threatening criminal processes against people for supporting other people getting abortions, or doctors or parents for allowing kids to get health care that will help them live their lives and be happy with who they are.

I know that Kit had shared with me a flyer from Tuesday calling for people to come down to the statehouse to show up, make noise, be in support of each other and also to vocalize resistance to the ongoing wave of transphobic laws that are being passed in the state of Texas. I wonder how you all feel about engaging on that level? Does that feel fruitful? Does it feel like banging your head against the wall? Does that matter?

I: Yeah, so I too identify as an anarchist, and have been organizing those spaces for the last 20 years. I like to tell people that I lost faith in electoral politics a long time ago. But I think the QTPIE's did call for a pack the gallery event, along with a couple of other liberal organizations. I think Equality Texas and the Texas Freedom Network did as well. And I think our justification for doing such is not that we're under no pretense that that's going to change the outcome. We're under no pretense that that's going to stop a law from being passed. But what we do operate on is that it's a place, one: that can be potentially very cathartic to be disruptive and in the faces of these elected representatives. Two: it's a trust building and community building exercise, and then three, it makes us more visible, which I think is a good thing.

Hear me out. There's a lot of talk about what makes a "good" anarchist. The joke that I've always heard is that you're only a good anarchist if even your roommates don't know your last name.

KO: [chortles]

I: Which I understand that, but at the same time, so many of our groups and organizations and affinity groups have been centered around this idea of black masks, code names, nobody knows us so that we can do these things that we're trying to do. But that leaves no room for people to access you. For people who are on the verge of being radicalized, or those who have been radicalized by experience, by lived experience and are looking for people who are of the same ilk. And so it's in doing these more visible actions that confront the electoral body in a way that makes us accessible to people who are still looking for us, even though they don't know that they're looking for us. So that's in my head, how I justify chanting at the statehouse and getting kicked out of the gallery as an anarchist.

KO: Yes, sometimes it just helps to let the people in charge know how angry you are, even if it doesn't stop them from doing what they're gonna do. But just being like "No, we're here, you're not going to erase us and you're gonna hear from us again." That's, to me, one value of showing up in their house, the legislature, to protest.

I've been involved in my share of those and I often think back to a really extraordinary moment and 2013, when Wendy Davis had her filibuster, people talk about her side of it a lot. But they talk less about the fact that the Capitol was filled to the brim with people protesting and chanting. And when Wendy Davis' filibuster failed, people's chanting was so loud that the lawmakers literally couldn't do their business. The legislative session ended, and the bill didn't get passed. Now, that was this amazing moment of victory, it felt incredibly powerful. Of course, the next day, the governor declared a special session to force the bill through anyway, which is what ended up happening, right?

We have to ask ourselves, does that completely devalue what happened be-

fore that moment before it was champion, and shutting things down? As radicals, whether we call ourselves anarchists or not, I think it's a question we discussed. And to me, it is still valuable, right? We did create these connections. We gave people this moment where they felt, literally, the halls of power shaking with our voices. It's a granite building, and it was vibrating or being so loud. That was great.

But yeah, then the question is, "How do we keep building on that? And how do we make people stay in the game, stay in what we're doing longer than just that one moment?" It's one of the reasons I appreciate so much the work that QTPIE does when making picnics and things. Because I've always been a believer in both celebrating the small victories, but also, somebody and I wish I could remember who told me this, but just the idea of "for every protest, a barbecue". I just really liked that.

We need to get together and build community. When I go out and protest, and I see who's willing to put their bodies on the line, that teaches me something about them that I take into my other interactions with them. But I also learned something from going to the picnic and seeing who's willing to cook for us, and who's helping to pick up, and who's being a part of the community in other ways.

It is really easy to get lost at the Capitol here, especially at the Texas capitol. It's just got this huge lawn leading up to it and people go and protested those Capitol steps. And they're just these invisible little dots. In some ways, I am very cynical about what goes on down there. But on the other hand, you seen the activist that did get the gallery cleared the other day, this week. That was powerful. That he made so much noise, and so much disruption, that they basically had to shut down the Texas capitol in order to do any business this time around. We have to hope it builds into something more that maybe happens outside those walls.

I: Yeah, exactly. Building into something more outside of the walls has to be the end goal anytime somebody who's on the left side of the [political] spectrum is participating in things like this. Because the reality is: if the goal is to create a parallel system of power that is able to meet our basic needs, and is able to take care of each other and ourselves, the only way we have that power is with people. People who trust each other, people who believe in each other, people who show up for each other. Somehow, somewhere, these people have to meet each other. Whether that's at a picnic, or whether it's at an action, or whatever it looks. That has to be the goal.

KO: Yeah we have to have on-ramps to this kind of work too. There's so many people out there that just want to be involved, and they don't know where to get plugged in, and it's better than nothing. If they get involved in one of the mainstream nonprofits, I'm glad they're doing something rather than nothing, like I said. But what if we have a door that's open for them to walk through? And yeah, maybe we have a couple of people who are standing by that metaphorical door vetting the people as they walk through a little bit, but we still have to have a door open.